



## Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law

---

Volume 34 | Issue 3

---

2002

# Complicity, Corruption, and Human Rights: Trafficking in Human Beings

Martina Vandenberg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil>

 Part of the [International Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Martina Vandenberg, *Complicity, Corruption, and Human Rights: Trafficking in Human Beings*, 34 Case W. Res. J. Int'l L. 323 (2002)  
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol34/iss3/3>

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law by an authorized administrator of Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

## COMPLICITY, CORRUPTION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS: TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

*Martina Vandenberg\**

Thank you very much for inviting me to Case Western Reserve Law School. Thank you to Nancy Kantor and Alice Simon for your assistance in getting me here. Thank you to Professor Chodosh for that very generous introduction. I would like to voice special thanks to Anne Moore. It is an honor to be here at Case, but particularly wonderful to be here with Anne, who served as a legal fellow in our office last summer. Anne did such a superb job, in fact, that she will be receiving a writing credit in our upcoming Bosnia report. We were very lucky to have Anne come to us as a fellow.

I would like to begin by saying a few words about Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch was founded in 1978. We conduct systematic human rights investigations of abuses in some seventy countries around the world, including the United States. We defend freedom of thought and expression, due process and equal protection of the law. We document and denounce murders, arbitrary detentions, disappearances, torture, discrimination and violations of international humanitarian law, also known as war crimes. Most importantly, Human Rights Watch does not accept money from any government or any United Nations agency, directly or indirectly. Human Rights Watch adopted this policy because it gives us both the right and the privilege to criticize all governments and the U.N. – which we do with both alacrity and great care.

Ultimately, Human Rights Watch's goal is to hold governments accountable. But to whom should they be accountable? We hold them accountable to all of us, accountable to all of you, but most of all, accountable to the victims of gross human rights violations – the victims of human rights violations that Human Rights Watch researchers document around the world every day.

---

\* Speech given on November 13, 2001 at Case Western Reserve School of Law. B.A., Pomona College, M. Phil. Oxford University, J.D., Columbia University. Attorney, Jenner & Block; Europe Researcher, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch (1997-2002); Researcher, Israel Women's Network (1997); Co-Founder of "Syostri," one of Russia's first rape crisis centers (1993-1996). Ms. Vandenberg is the primary author two Human Rights Watch reports, *HOPES BETRAYED: TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TO POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA FOR FORCED PROSTITUTION* (2002) and *KOSOVO: RAPE AS A WEAPON OF 'ETHNIC CLEANSING'* (2000). She is also the author of a report for the Israel Women's Network, *TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN TO ISRAEL AND FORCED PROSTITUTION* (1997).

I would like to share some of the accounts that women trafficked around the world have related to me and to my colleagues at Human Rights Watch. These women, survivors of trafficking into forced prostitution, told their stories to our researchers in brothels, in detention centers, in prisons, and, for the lucky ones, in shelters run by non-governmental organizations.

I will begin in Japan. In September of 2000, Human Rights Watch published findings from a six-year investigation on the trafficking human beings from Thailand into Japan for forced prostitution.<sup>1</sup> The report contained dozens of interviews and testimonies of women who found themselves trapped in debt bondage and servitude. One of those women, Miew,<sup>2</sup> spent more than two years working as a hostess in a so-called dating snack bar. She served drinks at the bar and accompanied clients to nearby hotels to provide sexual services. She had been recruited in Thailand with the promise of a generous salary each month, but when she arrived, she was told that she would have to work without any compensation whatsoever until she paid off a debt of 5 million Yen, about \$43,000 U.S. Dollars. Her manager immediately confiscated her passport. Miew believed that if she tried to escape she would be caught either by the Japanese gangs or by the police. She was housed under constant surveillance in an apartment just next door to the bar. Motion sensitive lights tracked the movements of all the women in the apartments, making it impossible for her to go out without being noticed.

After working there for two months, Miew's debt had actually gone up, not down. The debt ballooned to 6 million Yen, about \$51,000 U.S. Dollars, which included the cost of room, board and so-called protection fees, as well as a substantial fine for giving her phone number to her parents, a forbidden act. All the fines and expenses well exceeded the amount that she had actually been able to repay on her debt.<sup>3</sup>

Human Rights Watch investigators met another woman, Thip, who arrived in Japan in March of 1999.<sup>4</sup> She too had been promised a lucrative job as a waitress at a restaurant where she could work, save money, and remit money home to her family. But when she arrived, she was told that she had a debt of 4.5 million Yen, \$38,500 U.S. Dollars, for the cost of her travel and expenses relating to her job placement. She was put to work in a brothel where the owners kept her in a small room and forced her to provide sexual services to customers. She was only allowed to keep 2,000 Yen per sexual act, but at the same time she was charged 34,000 Yen each day for

---

<sup>1</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *OWED JUSTICE: THAI WOMEN TRAFFICKED INTO DEBT BONDAGE IN JAPAN* (2000), available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/japan>.

<sup>2</sup> All the names of victims have been changed in order to protect the women's security.

<sup>3</sup> *OWED JUSTICE: THAI WOMEN TRAFFICKED INTO DEBT BONDAGE IN JAPAN*, *supra* note 1, § I.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

rent and for protection money. In fact, she had to serve eighteen clients per day before even one client's payment would be applied against her debt.<sup>5</sup>

Whether women, children, or men – because trafficking can also happen to men – are trafficked into Japan, Western Europe, or the United States, victims trafficked into forced prostitution and other forms of forced labor find themselves treated as criminals, as illegal aliens, or both.<sup>6</sup> Most are arrested or detained. Some are tried and convicted for prostitution, document fraud, or undocumented status. Their traffickers, in stark contrast, more often than not continue to work with total impunity. Women trafficked into forced prostitution face the added stigma of having worked in the sex industry. Many of the trafficked women I have interviewed over the past four years knew that they would work in the sex industry. But they did not know, and could not possibly have known, that they would be sold as chattel, held in debt bondage, and forced to work in a modern-day form of slavery. The women that Human Rights Watch researchers have met around the world have been sold from owner to owner to owner.

Human Rights Watch found similar abuses in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In March 1999 and again in March 2001, Human Rights Watch researchers traveled to Bosnia to investigate trafficking of women and girls into forced prostitution.<sup>7</sup> Our researchers uncovered brothels scattered throughout both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The brothels were filled with women from Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania. Women in the brothels reported to us that they had been sold from brothel owner to brothel owner, placed in debt bondage, threatened and beaten. One woman from Ukraine told us:

---

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Although trafficking for forced prostitution dominates the headlines, trafficking for other forms of forced labor plagues victims around the world. See HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, BORDERLINE SLAVERY: CHILD TRAFFICKING IN TOGO (2003), available at <http://hrw.org/reports/2003/togo0403/> (describing children trafficked into domestic and agricultural labor). Indeed, even in the United States, prosecutions of traffickers who place victims in forced sweatshop and agricultural labor outnumber the cases of trafficking into the sex industry. See U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, ASSESSMENT OF U.S. ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (August 2003), available at <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/rpt/23495.htm>. By far the biggest trafficking case brought in U.S. history was *United States v. Kil Soo Lee*, involving over two hundred Vietnamese and Chinese victims, mostly women, held in a Daewoosa garment factory in American Samoa. On February 21, 2003, a jury convicted Lee, the owner of the factory; two co-conspirators pled guilty. For additional information on that case and others, see *United States v. Lee*, 159 F. Supp. 2d 1241 (D. Haw. 2001) and [http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2003/July/03\\_crt\\_414.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2003/July/03_crt_414.htm).

<sup>7</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, HOPES BETRAYED: TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TO POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA FOR FORCED PROSTITUTION (2002), available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/bosnia>.

I came to work in a bar. I knew nothing when they took me to Serbia. I was sold there four times to different men. They brought me to a bar and told me I had to work as a prostitute. And so I worked. But they never paid me. And every time I refused to work they beat me.<sup>8</sup>

Court documents and United Nations internal records obtained by Human Rights Watch indicated extensive police complicity and corruption. This corruption made trafficking possible – and highly profitable. In some towns, the local police actually held the women's passports in the police station, making escape virtually impossible. Local police frequently patronized the brothels, sending a message to the women that it would be futile to go to the police: the police were the owners' friends. Trafficking victims identified local police officers as clients. In one town, the police owned part of a nightclub as members of their local soccer club. The club manager decided that it would be great if the club also offered prostitution, so he purchased several trafficked women. In yet another case, a local police officer moonlighted as a waiter in a brothel. Trafficking victims in the Republika Srpska city of Prijedor told investigators that local police officers received free sexual services in the clubs in exchange for falsifying visas and work permits.<sup>9</sup> Some of those same trafficking victims identified nine international police officers, members of the U.N. International Police Task Force ("IPTF"), as their clients.<sup>10</sup>

Human Rights Watch also found evidence of complicity and involvement in trafficking-related activities by U.S. civilian contractors employed to provide services for SFOR, Stabilization Force, the NATO-led military peacekeepers in Bosnia. The contractors faced numerous allegations of buying women, transporting trafficked women, and violence against trafficking victims. A United Nations report on trafficking, published in May 2000, confirmed these allegations, stating that one SFOR contractor purchased two women, one from Moldova and one from Romania, from a bar owner for 7,000 Deutschmarks.<sup>11</sup> One of the two was a girl of sixteen.<sup>12</sup> One U.S. contractor confessed to U.S. military criminal investigators that he had purchased a woman from a brothel owner named "Debeli," who ran a nightclub located near the U.S. military base. The

---

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Trafficking in Human Beings in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Summary Report on Joint Trafficking Project of the UN Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, U.N. MIBH & U.N. OHCHR (May 2000). The report did not divulge the nationality or employer of the contractor. According to the report, NATO declined to waive the contractor's immunity.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 15.

contractor told investigators that he had paid Debeli 1,600 Deutschmarks for a Moldovan woman and an automatic weapon.<sup>13</sup> He did not face criminal prosecution.<sup>14</sup>

In all, between 1999 and October 2001, over 329 trafficked women and girls returned home from Bosnia and Herzegovina through a repatriation program run by the International Organization on Migration, an intergovernmental organization.<sup>15</sup>

Human Rights Watch defines trafficking to include all acts and attempted acts related to the recruitment, transport, transfer, sale or purchase of human beings for the purpose of placing them into conditions of servitude, including forced marriage, in which labor is extracted through physical and/or nonphysical means of coercion including debt bondage, blackmail, fraud, deceit, isolation, threat or use of physical force and psychological pressure.<sup>16</sup> Trafficking must be understood to apply to all labor sectors, not just the sex industry. Whether a person is trafficked into a sweat shop or trafficked into a brothel, the human rights violations that he or she experiences are fundamentally the same. This definition tracks the definition included in the U.N. Trafficking Protocol supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which was opened up for signature in December of 2000 by the United Nations.<sup>17</sup> As of October 2001, over 90 countries had signed the protocol, and three had ratified it.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> HOPES BETRAYED: TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TO POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA FOR FORCED PROSTITUTION, *supra* note 7, at 63.

<sup>14</sup> The Dayton Agreement prohibits the arrest and detention of NATO personnel. General Framework for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Agreement between the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO concerning the Status of NATO and its Personnel," Appendix B to Annex I-A, sec. 7. See HOPES BETRAYED: TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TO POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA FOR FORCED PROSTITUTION, *supra* note 7, ch. IX.

<sup>15</sup> HOPES BETRAYED: TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TO POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA FOR FORCED PROSTITUTION, *supra* note 7, at 12. By October 2002, that number had jumped to 498 trafficked women and girls repatriated to their home countries. Minors between the ages of 13 and 18 accounted for approximately 10 percent of the total.

<sup>16</sup> OWED JUSTICE: THAI WOMEN TRAFFICKED INTO DEBT BONDAGE IN JAPAN, *supra* note 1, § V.

<sup>17</sup> Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Nov. 15, 2000, U.N. Doc. A/RES/55/25 (2000) [hereinafter Trafficking Protocol]. As of Oct. 6, 2003, the United States had signed, but not ratified, the Trafficking Protocol. For an up-to-date list of signatories to the Protocol, see [http://www.unodc.org/unodc/crime\\_cicp\\_signatures\\_trafficking.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/crime_cicp_signatures_trafficking.html).

<sup>18</sup> Trafficking Protocol will enter into force ninety days after it accumulates forty ratifications, but not before the entry into force of the Convention. Trafficking Protocol, art. 17. As of Oct. 6, 2003, the Trafficking Protocol had garnered 117 signatories and 42

The process of ratification drags along very slowly as countries must rewrite domestic legislation to bring it into line with the provisions of the Trafficking Protocol.<sup>19</sup>

The United States recently passed anti-trafficking legislation that reflects a similar understanding of trafficking as a phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> President Clinton signed it into law on October 28, 2000.<sup>21</sup> The law is a response to CIA statistics that between 45,000 and 50,000 women and girls are trafficked into the United States every year for forced prostitution and forced labor.<sup>22</sup> Identifying trafficked persons and providing services for them in the United States has only just started. An organization in Los Angeles, the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking, also known as

---

ratifications. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime entered into force on September 29, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent examination of the Trafficking Protocol, see INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW GROUP, ANNOTATED GUIDE TO THE COMPLETE U.N. TRAFFICKING PROTOCOL, available at [http://www.hrlawgroup.org/resources/content/Traff\\_AnnoProtocol.pdf](http://www.hrlawgroup.org/resources/content/Traff_AnnoProtocol.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. § 7101 (2000). Congressman Chris Smith, one key sponsor of the law in the House of Representatives, included forced labor in the bill's provisions only after extensive pressure from non-governmental organizations, the Clinton Administration, and sponsors of competing bills in the House and Senate. Some Congressional staff members had originally planned to pass a stand-alone "sex-trafficking" law, but met fierce resistance from anti-trafficking NGOs in the United States. For a U.S. government self-assessment of its progress enforcing the law, dubbed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, or TVPA, see U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, ASSESSMENT OF U.S. ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (August 2003), available at <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/rpt/23495.htm>. Human Rights Watch and other non-governmental organizations criticized the U.S. government for its slowness in implementing one of the key provisions of the law, the "T" visa for victims of trafficking. The T-Visa permits victims of trafficking who would face "extreme hardship involving unusual and severe harm" if they returned to their countries of origin to remain in the United States for three years. After three years in T status, trafficking victims may apply for permanent residency. The Department of Justice did not issue regulations to underpin the T-Visa scheme until January 2002, fifteen months after the passage of the law. See Press Release, Department of Justice, Department of Justice Issues T Visa to Protect Women, Children, and All Victims of Human Trafficking (Jan. 24, 2002), available at [http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2002/January/02\\_crt\\_038.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2002/January/02_crt_038.htm).

<sup>21</sup> For the text of President Clinton's speech on the signing of 22 U.S.C. § 7101 (2000), The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, see [http://www.usembassy.it/file2000\\_10/alia/a010270a.htm](http://www.usembassy.it/file2000_10/alia/a010270a.htm). The law created new crimes and enhanced penalties for existing crime. As of August 2003, the U.S. government had brought charges for trafficking in persons against 103 defendants in 29 separate cases. ASSESSMENT OF U.S. ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, *supra*, at 12.

<sup>22</sup> AMY O'NEILL RICHARD, CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE, INTERNATIONAL TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN TO THE UNITED STATES: A CONTEMPORARY MANIFESTATION OF SLAVERY AND ORGANIZED CRIME, 13 (1999), available at <http://www.cia.gov/csi/monograph/women/trafficking.pdf>.

CAST, works in the vanguard of non-governmental organizations providing victims of trafficking with comprehensive services and support. The organization identifies and provides housing, medical care, psychological counseling, translators, and legal assistance for trafficking victims.<sup>23</sup>

We often see trafficking portrayed as a problem that occurs elsewhere, not in our cities and towns. But the human rights abuses associated with trafficking in the United States continue, and much more must be done. In most countries, including the United States, trafficked persons continue to be treated as illegal aliens and as criminals. Victims of trafficking find themselves arrested, deported, not protected. Some governments in countries of origin have, in fact, interpreted the prevention of trafficking to mean prevention of women's travel, simply trading one human rights violation for another.<sup>24</sup> In one small town in Romania, local Romanian police collected the passports of women suspected to have engaged in prostitution so that those women could no longer travel. Again, this was not trafficking prevention, but discrimination and a violation of the women's human rights.

Some states have adopted a law enforcement approach, rather than a rights-based approach that would focus on the human rights abuses associated with trafficking. These countries have pressed for prosecution. Human Rights Watch has long advocated the prosecution of traffickers. That is not the problem. Governments often portray women's reluctance to testify as the only reason why they cannot prosecute or convict traffickers. But the reality is that prosecution efforts require trafficking victims to take enormous risks to participate in trials against the perpetrators. The victims are forced to do so without witness protection, without relocation, and often without any acknowledgement of the danger that they face. One example in the United States includes a case of a woman who wore a wire to meet with one of her traffickers in 1998. She gathered evidence for the prosecution, which planned to prosecute the trafficker for document fraud. She received no protection, no special status in terms of her visa. Until there is serious witness protection in place for victims of trafficking, prosecutions cannot go forward.<sup>25</sup>

Around the world, trafficking victims are abused by their traffickers as they travel to the country of destination and by their "owners" upon arrival then face abuse at the hands of the very state authorities who have a

---

<sup>23</sup> CAST is "the only organization in the United States dedicated exclusively to serving trafficked persons." COALITION TO ABOLISH SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING, *Mission Statement*, at <http://www.castla.org/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his/[her] own." International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 16, 1966, art. (12)(2), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966).

<sup>25</sup> See ANTI-SLAVERY INTERNATIONAL, *HUMAN TRAFFIC, HUMAN RIGHTS: REDEFINING VICTIM PROTECTION* (2002).



responsibility under international and domestic law to protect them. Human rights organizations, like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, WITNESS, and the International Human Rights Law Group, in cooperation with local non-governmental organizations, have pushed hard over the last decade to bring international attention to the global phenomenon of trafficking. Most fervently, we seek to put an end to police corruption and state complicity, without which trafficking could not flourish. For example, in Greece, trafficking has become an enormous problem. Little bars, little restaurants, little clubs scattered throughout the Greek islands that used to offer fish, now offer trafficked women, many of them from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. When Human Rights Watch met with the Greek Minister of Public Order, Michalis Chrysochoidis, in 2000 and again in 2001, he confirmed that some Greek police officers had been arrested and convicted for corruption charges, many of them related to trafficking.<sup>26</sup>

Like their international counterparts, local non-governmental organizations have worked tirelessly to expose the grim consequences of trafficking. But for the local groups this exposure can be dangerous. La Strada-Ukraine, one of the leading anti-trafficking organizations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, received death threats after they publicly named several companies that they knew fronted for trafficking organizations in recruiting women in Ukraine. When they contacted the police in 1998 to report that they had received these threats, the police did not offer protection, but instead confirmed that they, indeed, were in danger. An officer who came to visit the La Strada office told staff members that the authorities could not possibly protect them.

In Israel, a local sex workers' rights organization called We Are Worthy published a newsletter in Hebrew and Russian in 1997. The members distributed this newsletter throughout the brothels in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Most of the articles dealt with HIV/AIDS education and how to use condoms. But the newsletter also contained one line that stated, "Isn't it unbelievable that women who are here working from Russia, their owners charge 150 shekels for a session, but they only get 15 shekels?" Because of that one line, and because the sex workers' rights organization had dared to distribute the newsletter in brothels where trafficked Russian-speaking women worked, the leader of the sex workers' rights organization began receiving death threats.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, MEMORANDUM OF CONCERN: TRAFFICKING OF MIGRANT WOMEN FOR FORCED PROSTITUTION INTO GREECE 19 (2001), *available at* [http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/greece/greece\\_memo\\_all.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/greece/greece_memo_all.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> For additional information on trafficking of women and girls into Israel, *see* THE ISRAEL WOMEN'S NETWORK, TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN TO ISRAEL AND FORCED PROSTITUTION (1997); AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AFFECTING TRAFFICKED WOMEN IN ISRAEL'S SEX INDUSTRY (2000), *available at*

It is not only risky for non-governmental organizations in the field, it is risky for the victims themselves. While many people use the language of “rescue” and emphasize “rescuing victims,” few people stop to reflect on what “rescue” means for the victims of trafficking into forced prostitution. More often than not, in countries around the world, rescue means nothing more than getting arrested and being held in a prison cell where you may be guarded by men who were your clients yesterday. It often means having a television camera thrust into your face, as those who conduct the raids prepare to garner publicity and additional funding. And in the most corrupt countries, “rescue” can mean being handed back over to your traffickers for a fee.

The language of “rescue” is dangerous in this particular context. Not only does it strip trafficking victims of agency – they do not “escape,” but are “rescued” by others – but it fails to acknowledge that the risk does not vanish once a victim has left the trafficker’s immediate control. The debts do not disappear. Family members remain at home and in danger of retaliation from traffickers. Going home is not necessarily safe. The traffickers know where the women live, they know where their families are, and make threats that are both credible and completely terrifying. Approximately 80% of the imprisoned trafficking victims awaiting deportation that I interviewed in the Israeli Neve Tirza prison in 1997 had children. The primary reason that they had agreed to travel abroad, the very reason that they had agreed to work at all, to take this risk, was because they wanted to send money home to their children. Those children remained in the women’s countries of origin – Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Lithuania, Romania – quite often living with the trafficked women’s own mothers. Those children provided primary tools of blackmail used by the traffickers.

Traffickers around the world have developed a protocol of their own: the purchase price for each victim becomes the basis for his or her debt, a debt that the victim must work off in order to escape. Those debts are not legal. They are contrary to public policy and contrary to law. But the trafficking victims do not know that, and the traffickers have highly effective enforcement mechanisms to convince the women and men who are trafficked that these debts are very real.<sup>28</sup> The debts supposedly cover transportation, fines for infractions, clothing, even housing in the brothels. The “owners” increase the debts with interest fees, fines, and simple accounting fraud. In some cases, brothel owners forced women to pay for their own medical care. Trafficking victims in Israel told researchers from the Israel Women’s Network that women held in the brothels were forced to

---

[http://web.amnesty.org/aidoc/aidoc\\_pdf.nsf/Index/MDE150172000ENGLISH/\\$File/MDE1501700.pdf](http://web.amnesty.org/aidoc/aidoc_pdf.nsf/Index/MDE150172000ENGLISH/$File/MDE1501700.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Every victim of trafficking that I have interviewed around the world knew her purchase price. Those prices ranged from five hundred dollars to thousands of dollars.

have sex without using condoms because clients were willing to pay extra for sex without condoms. The women who became pregnant had to pay for illegal abortions themselves out of their so-called earnings, of which there were none. Traffickers simply added the medical costs on to the trafficked person's debt. The women also faced a five hundred dollar fine for each day after the abortion that they could not work.<sup>29</sup>

I would like to leave you with some success stories that can remind all of us that we can combat these human rights abuses. The trafficking outlook is not completely hopeless.

In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, anti-trafficking activists established a network of organizations, the La Strada network. La Strada, with organizations in Ukraine, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Macedonia, provides services for victims of trafficking, including psychological counseling, hotlines, medical care, and shelter. La Strada also assists returning trafficking victims recover from the trauma of trafficking, trauma resulting from traffickers' use of rape, physical violence, psychological abuse, and terror as tools of control. La Strada has a hotline in each of these countries and has received hundreds of calls from women trapped in slavery-like conditions in the Balkans, in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, and in the United States. They have also received hundreds of calls from women and men who are considering migrating and want to know if the companies they signed up with are legitimate. La Strada provides this information, as well as pointers on what rights migrants have in countries of destination.

In one case, reported in early 1998 by the *New York Times*, La Strada received a call from a woman imprisoned in a brothel in Italy.<sup>30</sup> She had no idea where she was. She did not even know what city she was in. She had borrowed a passed-out drunk customer's cell phone and called her mother in Ukraine. Her mother called La Strada. La Strada contacted the Italian police. The trafficked woman described exactly which bus line went by her window in front of the brothel. Using the numbers on the bus lines and a description of what she saw outside that window, law enforcement authorities in Italy located the brothel and found this woman.

In another case in 1999, international police and local police jointly raided a brothel in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One trafficked woman had managed to make a call out. She called her father in the Ukraine, and he went to the police. The police contacted Interpol. Interpol contacted the local police in Bosnia and the United Nations Mission in Bosnia. The United Nations followed up, and two days later, local police, accompanied by international police officers, raided the brothel, and found the woman

---

<sup>29</sup> Interview with a trafficking victim from St. Petersburg, Russia in the Neve Tirza Prison (1997). This interview was conducted for the Israel Women's Network Report.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Specter, *Traffickers New Cargo: Naïve Slavic Women Contraband Women*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 18, 1998, at A1.

and three others living in utter squalor in small rooms behind the nightclub. The women wanted to leave and eventually were able to return home.

La Strada-Ukraine, after long negotiations with Ministry of Interior officials, received permission in 1997 to meet trafficking victims immediately as they disembarked from their flights in Kiev. A La Strada representative met each returning trafficking victim at the arrival gate and walked each woman through passport control. That accompaniment proved important, particularly because many of the women returned home with completely irregular documents, their traffickers having stripped them of their passports. After taking the women through passport control and fending off the passport control officers, La Strada staff members would slip the women out a back exit of the airport. Women returning unassisted feared finding traffickers waiting in the arrival area, eager to traffic returning women back out of the country, ready to sell them to another willing purchaser in another country. Instead, traffickers found themselves thwarted by a small, plucky NGO.

Accountability matters. I began today with the statement Human Rights Watch's goal, ultimately, is accountability. Together, international human rights organizations and local human rights organizations, are winning the fight to combat trafficking. We measure our progress in small steps: a ratification of the protocol here, a model witness protection program there, a successful prosecution somewhere else. Together, we can eradicate this modern day form of slavery, protect the human rights of all persons, and ensure that those government officials who facilitate trafficking – police officers on the take, corrupt members of ministries of the interior, corrupt members of ministries of foreign affairs providing false passports to traffickers – face prosecution. I look forward to the day when trafficking victims no longer sit in prison, and the day when their traffickers do. Thank you.

